

those smoky nights by luminaryestuary

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Summary:

You've walked those streets a thousand times and still you end up here.

Joyce copes with Bob's death and begins to acknowledge her feelings for Hopper.

Angst and Fluff. Post-Season 2.

1. Bridge

Author's Note:

The poem throughout this work is called "Antilamentation" by Dorianne Laux. I read it in an unrelated context and found that to me, it really resonated with Joyce.

*Regret nothing. Not the cruel novels you read
to the end just to find out who killed the cook.
Not the insipid movies that made you cry in the dark,
in spite of your intelligence, your sophistication.*

Some people go to support groups for life's problems; others go to counselors, therapists, pastors and priests.

Joyce builds bridges.

Not real bridges, but imaginary ones.

It's a strange habit she has, almost a compulsion; a desperate desire to put wide spans of twenty-four hour planks in between her and the gaping chasm of grief and sadness lurking below.

She's done it for as long as she can remember, only stepping off the completed structure when she feels like enough time has passed for her to move on.

She built a weak, spindly bridge after Lonnie cheated for the first time.

A slightly sturdier bridge sprung up after he slapped her around once when he was drunk, leaving dark bruises under her eye, on her cheek, smattered across her arms and shoulders.

A titanium-reinforced, earthquake-proof behemoth took form after he finally left.

She built a rope bridge, tentative and fraying, after they brought Will back from the Upside Down.

When they freed him from the Mind Flayer, she built a shining steel cable bridge, tall and indestructible.

The week after Bob is interred in the ground at Hawkins Cemetery, she begins to count the days.

Bob's bridge materializes alongside Will's bridge, which is oddly fitting. It's smaller, concrete and steel in combination, modern-looking.

Many days after she steps off Will's bridge, she's still constructing Bob's.

Each morning, like a ritual, she mentally adds another piece. Mentally re-counts each piece that's already there, firm and resolute.

She feels like she owes him this much, even if they weren't in love as deeply as she'd hoped to be; even if she was only half serious when she told him that she'd move to Maine with him.

It's also distracting and oddly comforting. It helps her work through the sporadic grief that surges forth whenever she has to drive past Radio Shack, whenever she rents a scary movie for Will.

Somehow, she gets through Christmas, New Year's, and the dark, frozen sharpness of winter.

On a gray afternoon in mid-March, she notices a shift.

It's completely unexpected and probably against her better judgment, but it's definitely there.

Hopper stops by the store on his lunch break that day - he's made a habit of visiting her at work when his schedule lines up with hers. At first she'd found it sweet, endearing even — now, she can't help but feel glum whenever he doesn't have a chance to come in.

Joyce smiles brightly when he walks through the door — she's all teeth and maybe gums too, like a teenage girl in the throes of young love.

Have I always done that? she wonders, then bites the inside of her lip. Hard.

Well, she's not dreaming.

He asks how she's doing, holds his hat in his hands and rubs the brim between his thumbs and forefingers.

They chat for a few minutes, a bit of small talk. His gaze lingers on hers far longer than usual.

Wait a minute. Has he always looked at me that way?

Her pulse thrums in her throat, suddenly wild. Her cheeks and neck feel hot.

When he turns to leave, she tries to clamp down on this odd feeling in her chest — tries to dissect it, tries to trace the fine, delicate edges in her mind. It moves to and fro like a hummingbird, zipping around her ribs, twisting through her stomach and sparking a small fire that begins to burn almost painfully.

Hopper is out of the store and down the sidewalk by the time that Joyce realizes she has a crush.

A crush! It's a feeling that seems too ridiculous to entertain at this point in her life.

Women her age didn't experience these things, especially women with kids and a divorce under their belt. Women her age were mature and sensible, and sought out perfectly reasonable relationships with perfectly reasonable men.

But maturity and sensibility and reason all go sailing right out the window, because she has a goddamn crush on Jim Hopper, Chief of Hawkins Police: adoptive father to a telekinetic teenager, overly charming skirt chaser (though possibly reformed?), and her former high school boyfriend.

She doesn't immediately try to talk herself out of it, which is mildly surprising.

There are all sorts of reasons why they'd never work together.

Logical reasons. *Very* logical reasons, thank you very much.

Her heart isn't interested in hearing about any of them, quite frankly, no matter how many rational, fact-based theories she dreams up.

Throughout all of this silly nonsense, Joyce continues to add to Bob's bridge, but it's slow going. The pieces seem to materialize out of order, and they don't always fit quite right.

On an unseasonably warm April day, a glimpse of Hopper's Blazer cruising down Main Street is enough to send her pulse off and racing.

He drives by while she's in the middle of ringing up an order for Mrs. Calloway, and a full body flush curls all the way from her toes to her ears. This causes the elderly widow to ask, "Are you feeling alright, dear? You're quite pink!"

That's the exact moment that it hits her, a lightning strike and clap of thunder booming above her head—

This is much more than a crush.

Joyce is falling in love.

Goddamnit.

2. Stairwell

Summary for the Chapter:

*You've walked those streets a thousand times and still
you end up here.*

Joyce copes with Bob's death and begins to acknowledge her feelings for Hopper.

Angst and Fluff. Post-Season 2.

Notes for the Chapter:

The poem throughout this work is called "Antilamentation" by Dorianne Laux. I read it in an unrelated context and found that to me, it really resonated with Joyce.

*Not the lover you left quivering in a hotel parking lot,
the one you beat to the punchline, the door, or the one
who left you in your red dress and shoes, the ones
that crimped your toes, don't regret those.*

The Spring Fling rolls around, a windy, stormy Friday night in late April when the middle school and high school have a combined dance in the high school gymnasium. The music is upbeat and everyone is suffering from cabin fever after a particularly brutal winter; the kids are all loose and flinging limbs, a juvenile riot beneath streamers and paper mache flowers.

She helps Hopper sneak El into the Hawkins High School, letting them in through a locked door in the back of a stairwell near the cafeteria.

The stairwell.

The stairwell where they'd tucked themselves under the alcove and smoked cigarettes while cutting class, stifling coughs and laughter in their sleeves. At least, until Mr. Cooper had caught them. They'd just moved to the stairwell next to the gym after that, but *this* stairwell had been the first.

It had also been the stairwell where she'd stuck her tongue out at him, teasingly; he'd backed her up against the wall, his lips finding hers while his fingers skimmed along the skin at the edge of her skirt.

She wonders if he remembers that day.

Hopper reaches out, warmly squeezes her shoulder as he comes through the door with El; he pauses for a moment, grinning a goofy, excited grin. He smells like tobacco and woodsmoke and aftershave, a scent that tingles its way down her back.

"Just like old times, right?" he says, a mischievous shine in his eyes.

He definitely remembers.

"Just like old times," she squeaks out, nearly unable to speak due to this sudden, tremendous onslaught of emotion and desire that is sweeping through her.

His expression flickers slightly; something is there, a deep, deep well, just beyond his amusement.

Joyce knows what it is — desires it, even — but can't bring herself to name it.

Not yet.

"You look beautiful," she says to El; the girl blushes, and then they're off.

Her neck is prickly as the three of them walk toward the gym. El is close to Hopper's side, both a shadow and a proper daughter.

Their laughter echoes in the dark hallways.

Joyce rubs her shoulder discreetly, attempts to soothe the tingling sensation where he touched her.

It was an accident, she tells herself. He just got caught up in the moment.

But he touches you all the time, her own voice responds.

He didn't mean anything by it, she retorts, but she already knows what will come next.

You saw how he looked at you back there.

She can't disagree with herself on that one.

Joyce and Hopper help chaperone the dance from opposite sides of the gym, but during the slow songs she catches him staring at her more than a few times. She holds his gaze at one point, her chin tilted upward, inviting. He stops moving, she sees his posture change; for a moment they're utterly alone.

He's interrupted by the principal a moment later, and the link is broken.

Joyce watches him, brushes the hair off her face, muses to herself.

He looks so far away, lost across a vast sea of awkward, swaying teenagers.

Not the nights you called god names and cursed

your mother, sunk like a dog in the living room couch,

chewing your nails and crushed by loneliness.

Bob's bridge is complete a few days later, but in her mind, she remains standing on it, swaying with uncertainty.

The ground is right there, solid and sturdy.

She realizes that she's afraid to step off.

3. Fever

Summary for the Chapter:

*You've walked those streets a thousand times and still
you end up here.*

Joyce copes with Bob's death and begins to acknowledge her feelings for Hopper.

Angst and Fluff. Post-Season 2.

Notes for the Chapter:

The poem throughout this work is called "Antilamentation" by Dorianne Laux. I read it in an unrelated context and found that to me, it really resonated with Joyce.

*You were meant to inhale those smoky nights
over a bottle of flat beer, to sweep stuck onion rings
across the dirty restaurant floor, to wear the frayed
coat with its loose buttons, its pockets full of struck matches.*

Joyce gets sick — really sick — in late May.

It happens somewhere in between jostling kids and work shifts; between shrugging out of her sweat-soaked vest and shirt and long, hot days when the air conditioner at Melvald's decides to quit working properly.

Donald is a real tightwad, so the air conditioner doesn't get fixed for a week.

A couple of weeks, to be honest.

She comes home late one afternoon, her bones aching and her muscles tight, like she'd just run for miles with no rest.

Will is doing his homework in his room and Jonathan is working after school — a photography internship for the local paper — so she starts dinner a few minutes after she walks through the door. It takes every ounce of strength to fill her large, dinged pot with water and put it on the stove to boil for pasta.

Joyce plops herself down at the table with a sigh and a cigarette, feeling abnormally drained.

Hopper and El come over for dinner — now a twice weekly occurrence — about ten minutes later. He's barely stepped into the living room before his gaze alights on her, and suddenly he's only a few feet away, touching her sweaty face and frowning. He presses the back of his hand against her cheek, then her forehead; she shivers at the contact.

"You're really warm. You feeling okay?" he asks, eyes soft and struck through with concern.

It takes more than a moment for Joyce to remember that he's very practiced in this kind of thing; that he'd been a father before El, in another life far away from here.

"I'm fine, Hop," she laughs, "just a bit overheated. Donald still hasn't fixed the air conditioning." She attempts to helplessly shrug, but even moving her shoulders feels like it takes too much effort; her voice sounds toneless and nothing like her.

He frowns again. Despite this bizarre exhaustion, her heart still flutters in her chest, because he's noticed that she isn't fine.

Hopper takes over dinner preparations after that. He instructs her to go sit down and rest, and in the same breath asks the kids to come help. Any other day, she'd argue with him; instead, she sinks into the couch cushions, listening to Will and El laugh in the kitchen, dizzily remembering the feel of Hopper's hand on her face before falling asleep.

She wakes up once that night, fully clothed and in her bed, unsure of how she got there, but she's tired, just so tired—

The next day she faints while standing at the cash register, nearly bumping her head as the linoleum floor rushes up to meet her.

She's only out for a few moments, but she is barely coherent after she comes to, shaking and pale and sweating profusely from a too-high fever.

Hopper is the one who comes to take her home.

She adamantly refuses to go to the hospital, but she barely remembers being curled up to his chest, clutching at his shirt as he carries her out to the Blazer.

She has hazy memories that follow, muddled visions that swim close to her and dart away as soon as she reaches for them.

Pain, dull and aching.

Raging, searing heat.

There are fever-induced dreams, where she's sobbing with blood on her hands and her arms and *oh my god* blood is everywhere, why is there blood everywhere, this isn't her blood and if it isn't her blood *then whose fucking blood is this?*

Hopper is occasionally present in these dreams. He pours cold water over her palms, and gently smooths cool, calloused hands across her skin. The flinty blue of his eyes crashes around her like an ocean; the smells of saltwater and tangy copper hang thick in the air.

In between dreams, she recalls ice chips on her tongue, cool towels on her forehead.

She's half-clothed and shivering, burning at the same time.

El sits on the bed with her, holding her hand.

Will frets behind El somewhere, his voice hushed.

Jonathan whispers to Will, calm and reassuring. They're back lit by the hall light, their shadows long on the carpet.

Hopper is tightly framed by the doorway. He squints at her in the low light, clearly worried.

There isn't much to remember after that — just blackness.

Joyce wakes up in her bed once the fever finally breaks.

It's dark outside, and she isn't sure of what day it is. It feels like she's been sick for a month, but she guesses that maybe thirty-six hours have elapsed since she fainted.

Hopper is sitting on the edge of the mattress, too close and not close enough; his hand is cool and dry against her forehead, her cheeks.

"Hey," he says, and he sounds relieved.

"Hey yourself," she replies, a whole-body ache starting at her toes and rolling upwards. "How long has it been?"

"About a day and a half. Your fever's gone." He folds his hands in his lap, studies her. "How're you feeling?"

"Like shit." She stretches her arms above her head, wincing.

"Can't say I'm surprised." He watches her every movement, his expression somewhat closed off. "You were really sick, Joyce."

"Well, I'm better now," she says, sitting up with her back against the headboard, pouting slightly. "I'll try not to faint again. Those old biddies will be gossiping about that for weeks."

Now he's amused, and his face changes entirely, his eyes crinkling around the edges. It makes him appear middle-aged and teenaged at the same time. In her mind's eye, she sees Hopper (*maybe he was seventeen?*), the wind combing through his blonde hair as he laughs and drives that beat-up old *piece-a shit* Chevy his dad had given him

"How're the kids?" she says suddenly, panic rising, flooding her

chest.

Lonnie would have a field day if he knew she'd been this sick, this careless.

"They're fine. Will and El are with the Wheelers tonight. They're both staying over. I thought— we thought it might be easier. For you." Hopper pauses. "I'm not really sure where Jonathan went."

"It's okay." Her lips twitch with a wry smile. "I'm not sure where he is half the time myself. He just... goes."

His posture relaxes a bit, and she self-consciously tucks a wild tangle of hair behind her ear.

There's a brief silence that stretches out, out a bit further.

"You had me pretty worried for a minute," he admits, and there's a trace of sadness in his voice that she can't ignore.

"You didn't need to worry," she whispers, her throat dry.

"Too late for that," he whispers back, and then he's reaching up, gently smoothing hair off her face, his gaze slate blue and more open than she's ever seen.

She suddenly can't breathe — the rush of blood in her ears drowns everything out.

Her surprise must be obvious, because he realizes how intimate the gesture is, and withdraws quickly, like he's been stung.

"I, uh..." He clears his throat, moves to get up. "Sorry."

There's such heaviness in him, the weight of it bearing down, closing him off to her.

Joyce says nothing, but reaches over and catches his hand, twines her fingers through his, waits for his reaction.

Hopper stills — stares at her, blinking; caught between past and present.

She stares back, in what she hopes is a meaningful way.

A moment later he leans in, hesitates, then presses his lips to her cheek. Instead of moving away, however, he sighs, touches his forehead to hers with his eyes closed.

She shivers at how close he is now, the skin of her arms speckling with goosebumps. Familiar heat coils tightly, shiny and raw, low in her belly.

The guilt surrounding Bob's death has been gnawing at her for months, but there's a growing part of her that is infinitely weary.

Weary of the grief. Weary of the loneliness.

She brushes his face lightly, skimming her fingertips along the scruff of his beard. He pulls back to look at her, curious.

"Stay." Her voice is faint, but she sees his eyes widen fractionally. "Please."

"You sure?"

She nods, swallowing.

There's an implication that hangs, oscillating, twisting, in the space between them.

His expression is unreadable. "Okay."

*You've walked those streets a thousand times and still
you end up here.*

Hopper stays.

For such large man, he fits perfectly in her bed, like he's always slept there — curled on his side next to her, yet respectfully never touching. His chest rises and falls, the occasional mumble of a dream

escaping him. Other than that, he is very nearly silent.

There's a long stretch of moments where she lies awake, staring at the ceiling in the pitch black, listening to his quiet, even breaths.

His presence feels... right.

She knows it deep in her bones; knots her fingers in the sheets, over and over, until she sleeps.

4. Still Here

Summary for the Chapter:

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you end up here.*

Joyce copes with Bob's death and begins to acknowledge her feelings for Hopper.

Angst and Fluff. Post-Season 2.

Notes for the Chapter:

The poem throughout this work is called "Antilamentation" by Dorianne Laux. I read it in an unrelated context and found that to me, it really resonated with Joyce.

*Regret none of it, not one
of the wasted days you wanted to know nothing,
when the lights from the carnival rides
were the only stars you believed in, loving them
for their uselessness, not wanting to be saved.*

Her sleep is everything but dreamless.

It's mostly a series of jumbled images, fractured glass shards of memories.

Will lying in a hospital bed, tubes and wires everywhere.

Baby Jonathan smiling, blowing raspberries and cooing at her.

Her wrist, bruised by anger (look what you made him do), mottled

with purple and blue and green.

Hopper's face, smudged with dirt and grime, between her hands, her name escaping him on a choked breath.

Will, furious and alien, his fingers crushing her throat.

Sunlight streaming through the broken window in the living room, birdsong piercing the quiet of the house.

Hopper's arms around her the night before he leaves for the Army, hot tears streaking her makeup down her cheeks.

It's dizzying, overwhelming, she wants to cry out — and then suddenly she's elsewhere, a place that she's never seen before.

It's the strangest thing.

She's standing on a bridge, utterly alone, surrounded by endless, endless white.

There is no horizon — just blankness, silence for miles in all directions.

She turns in a full circle, trying to gauge her closest surroundings.

Wait a minute.

This bridge...

This is Bob's bridge.

Joyce steps off the edge of the structure she's been building in her mind for so many months, considers her handiwork.

Bob would be proud, she thinks.

A shiver travels through her; the air itself seems to sigh, expand, contract.

No.

Bob wouldn't want me doing this, because he's dead.

He's dead, and I'm still here.

She closes her eyes.

"You know, you're a pretty great architect. I always figured that Jonathan and Will got their talents from you."

It's Bob's voice, clear as day.

Joyce opens her eyes.

Bob stands at the other end of the bridge, grinning, hands shoved in his pockets.

He's healthy and whole and untouched.

She wants to say something, anything, but her throat is tight, so tight — she can't make a sound.

"It's alright, Joyce. I'm doing just fine. You don't need to worry."

Bob pauses, weighs his words, nods to himself.

"See, here's the thing — life is for living."

His expression softens; his eyes are kind, wistful.

"Do me a favor and live a little, okay?"

Then he's gone.

*You've traveled this far on the back of every mistake,
ridden in dark-eyed and morose but calm as a house
after the TV set has been pitched out the upstairs
window. Harmless as a broken ax. Emptied
of expectation.*

Joyce wakes up at 6:08 AM, suddenly desperate to brush her teeth. The house is perfectly still.

Outside, the sun is beginning to touch the deep blue darkness of the sky, filling the room with dim light.

She sits up, blinks; looks down at Hopper.

He'd stayed beside her all night, folded slightly inward on himself, his arm tucked under the pillow.

Her heart squeezes in her chest. He's so relaxed in sleep that he looks years younger. His dirty blonde hair is unruly, longer than it used to be. Strands of it curl around his neck and ears.

She wants to smooth them back from his face, like he'd done to her the night before, but she can't bring herself to wake him.

She quietly slips out of bed instead, pausing only to grab clean clothing, and goes to the bathroom to take a shower.

The warm water pours over her like a baptism, washing away the sweat and blistering pain of the fever.

It makes her feel human again.

Joyce wraps a towel around herself after she brushes her teeth; looks at herself in the foggy mirror. Steam curls around her in lazy wisps.

She leans in closer to the mirror, inspects her reflection. Her hair is damp, the tips already drying and feathered. She's lost weight in the past few months and her bones are sharp edges beneath her skin. The hollows of her cheeks are more pronounced than usual, and there are dark circles under her eyes.

There's no denying that she looks like hell.

Yet after everything she's been through in the past two years, there's still something left of her.

Something that's stronger than before.

The bedroom door opens, and soft footsteps tread down the hallway.

Hopper.

Her heart leaps wildly; she tries in vain to tamp it down, subdue it, that twinge of familiar guilt prodding at her subconscious.

Live a little, okay?

Bob's voice is so clear, like he's right there with her.

She almost turns to look for him.

Almost.

5. About Time

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Relax. Don't bother remembering any of it.

Joyce finds Hopper in the kitchen. His back is to her; he's making a pot of coffee.

He hums a Tom Petty song under his breath.

Learning to Fly. One of her favorites.

She stands there, head tilted to the side, listening.

Imagines him humming along to every halfway decent song that plays over the radio.

Imagines him waking up in her bed every morning.

Imagines him and the kids and her; imagines breakfasts, lunches, dinners; imagines birthdays and school dances and art shows and

graduations and college visits.

She thinks about the Snow Ball, the two of them standing outside in the chilly December air, his arm wrapped tightly around her. She thinks about the many times since then that he's checked in on her, at home, at Melvald's.

Two years ago, they were barely even exchanging looks, let alone comfort or support.

Yet here he is, all this time later — staying in her house, looking after her kids, taking care of her when she can't take care of herself.

It's funny, really. They've been friends, then lovers, then strangers; twenty-odd years later they've circled back to friends, friends who are standing on an edge that is both familiar and foreign at the same time.

Maybe they were always meant to come back to this place.

Hopper finishes putting the coffee on, and notices that she's watching him.

"Everything okay?" he asks, frowning. "Do you still feel sick?"

"No," she says, "I feel pretty good, actually. Much better."

"About time." He grins at her, and her heart speeds up, nearly tripping over itself.

All she can think about is pressing kisses under his jaw, down his neck, along the muscles of his shoulders.

"Hop, listen, I..." she trails off, suddenly overwhelmed; she rubs the heels of her palms against her eyes.

This should be easy, but it's not.

Trying to find the right thing to say is proving to be an impossible task.

She takes a steadying breath, lowers her arms to her sides.

Hopper is facing her, leaning back against the counter. He looks like a deer in headlights, which would be comical if she wasn't so flustered.

She tries again.

"Jim, I— I think we need to talk... about... some things," she begins, then pauses.

Everything is fighting to tumble out of her; the last thing she wants is to address this— this— this thing between them and end up with a bad case of neurotic babbling.

Across the room, he chuckles nervously in the absence of words.

"You haven't called me Jim since tenth grade," he says, his voice husky.

Joyce flushes, her cheeks warming. "Has it really been that long?"

A shrug, a low huff of laughter. "Something like that."

"I just... God. When did we get so old?" she says, fighting the urge to chew on her thumbnail.

"We aren't," he replies, and that look appears on his face again; the same look from the night of the Spring Fling, the one she'd tried to ignore.

She goes to him before she can even really think about it. He folds her into his arms automatically, presses his nose to her hair.

He smells good, masculine, sleep-rumpled; he smells like Hopper but he also smells a bit like her, too.

Joyce feels that sense of belonging again, the rightness of it settling across her shoulders.

He sighs, and she tilts her head back to look up at him.

"Just like old times, right?" she whispers.

She's so close to him; her chest aches and aches.

Hopper brushes loose strands of hair away from her face. His fingertips are feather-light but linger on her skin, as if he's secretly reveling in finally, finally being able to touch her like this.

"Kinda," he says, one corner of his mouth tugging upward into a half-smile. "Not sure if you've noticed, but we've got kids now. Bills, responsibilities, all that stuff we never thought we'd have."

She makes a little sound of agreement, pretends to think long and hard about it.

"Do you think this could work?" Joyce pauses, anxiously worries her bottom lip between her teeth. "Y'know, um... you and me? Dating?"

There's a palpable shift in the air, now that she's awkwardly addressed the elephant in the room — the attraction that's been growing between them for so many months.

"You ready for that?" His gaze is stormy and intense, the muscles in his jaw twitching slightly. He grinds his molars when he's nervous, a habit he's had since he was a teenager.

"Yes," she says, definitively. "I'm ready."

He exhales. "Okay."

"We can figure it out as we go, you know?" she says, glancing down. His bare feet bracket hers, almost perfectly. "I mean, we've managed to do that much so far with—" She stops, looks at him again, the last two years a fresh blur in her mind. "Well, with everything that's happened."

He nods, taking the opportunity to touch her face again. His thumb traces the line of her cheekbone.

"I think—" Hopper's voice catches, and he takes a deep breath before continuing. "I think I might've grown up a little bit since high school. I'm not as much of a pain in the ass."

He adds that last part with a smirk.

She suppresses a laugh, allows it to take form on her lips as a small smile. “I don’t know, I liked you a lot back then. Even when you were being a stubborn, hard-headed idiot.”

“Oh yeah?” He looks amused, his gaze flickering down to her lips and back to her eyes.

“Mm-hmm,” she hums, standing on her tiptoes, her palms flat against his chest.

The silence of the house suddenly seems magnified, pressing down on them both.

Hopper holds her face and kisses her, tentative and unsure, like he’s asking permission across all the years since they last touched each other in this way.

That aching, terrible longing evaporates in an instant.

She beams at him — a happy, radiant grin — so he kisses her again, more firmly this time, and she sighs as she winds his shirt into her fists.

Then his hands settle on her hips, gather her against him as the kisses turn ever more insistent, hungrier. Her mind is pleasantly fuzzy, glowing even — lost in the feel and the scent of him because he’s everywhere, he’s all that she can breathe in.

Somehow they fumble their way back to her bedroom; Joyce likes the way he looks at her, his eyes darkening in the shadows of early morning.

Logically, she knows where they’re heading, and logically they should probably stop, but she embraces it instead; kisses him until her lips are all but bruised, because she wants this, oh god she wants this—

Hopper tugs her shirt over her head, she pulls him onto the bed, and there’s no more looking inward.

His beard brushes against her collarbone, her navel, her inner thigh.

She threads her fingers through his hair, doesn't hold back when he makes her gasp, every nerve in her body awake and alive.

His hands slide along the bare skin of her back, her legs, her stomach; his palms are calloused and rough, like they were in her fever dreams.

He's gentle, impossibly gentle, moves as though she might shatter and fall into a million pieces beneath him.

She whispers his name, pulls him close and closer still; scratches her nails down his back to remind him that she won't.

Let's stop here, under the lit sign on the corner,

and watch all the people walk by.